

In fascistic Independence Day speech, Brazil's Bolsonaro condemns “strikes, social disorder”

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14 September 2020

On September 7, Brazil's Independence Day, the country's fascistic President Jair Bolsonaro delivered a far-right rant centered on what he defined as a national identity based upon “fear of god,” “respect for the family” and a struggle for “liberty” and against “communism.”

In his two-and-a-half-minute speech delivered on prime-time national TV and radio, Bolsonaro omitted any mention of the social disaster caused by the criminal response to the COVID-19 pandemic by his government and the Brazilian ruling class as a whole.

Instead, he presented a short and twisted history of Brazil in which “Brazilians always spilled their blood for liberty.”

The short statement began by resurrecting old tropes about “racial harmony” in Brazil; that “national identity began to be drawn by means of miscegenation between Indians, whites and blacks.” These conceptions have been used historically to impose “national unity,” deny social inequality and portray movements opposing it as agents of “foreign meddling.”

Bolsonaro then drew a straight line from independence in 1822 to the delirious claim that Brazil had beaten back “numerous invasions” in the 19th century—which was actually dominated by civil wars. He then skipped to the Brazilian military’s participation in World War II “to help the world defeat fascism and Nazism” and, finally, his main theme, to the 1964 US-backed coup against the bourgeois-nationalist President João Goulart.

Bolsonaro stated that “in the 1960s, when the shadow of communism threatened us, millions of Brazilians who identified with the national desire to preserve democratic institutions took to the streets against a country gripped by ideological radicalization, strikes, social disorder and generalized corruption.”

He concluded by portraying his own administration as the continuation of this history, stating “we have won yesterday, we are winning now and we will always win.”

The open praise for the bloody 1964 coup, which

established a 21-year dictatorship and initiated a series of US-backed military takeovers across South America, as a movement fulfilling the desire of “millions” in a moment of “social disorder” and “strikes” is not only a historical falsification, but a grave threat.

Bolsonaro, a former Army captain who spent his whole 28-year career as a House backbencher for the state of Rio de Janeiro making apologies for the crudest acts of military repression of the regime, has been obsessed with “social disorder” breaking out in Brazil since the first day of his administration.

His coup threats are generally dismissed by authorities in Congress, the Supreme Court, state governments and the press as delusional and inconsequential. This was the ruling establishment’s response in April, after Bolsonaro took part in a fascist rally in front of the Army headquarters in the capital of Brasília calling for the outlawing of the opposition to his gross mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic. Their attitude was summed up by the conservative *Estado de S. Paulo* daily, which editorialized: “It is comforting to realize, however, that, this time, authorities from every institution in the Republic reacted strongly against another offense to democracy by Bolsonaro and his followers.”

Only three days after Bolsonaro’s Independence Day fascist appeal, the outgoing Supreme Court president, Justice Dias Toffoli, stated that he had “never seen directly on the part of Bolsonaro or his ministers any action against democracy.” This statement was made even as the Supreme Court is judging cases linking Bolsonaro to the organization of the far-right demonstrations in which the president regularly takes part, and amid the Justice Ministry’s drawing up of a so-called “anti-fascist list” of public servants, mostly law-enforcement officials, who are seen as not sufficiently adhering to Bolsonaro’s drive to build a far-right base within the police forces—all but setting them up as targets for his supporters.

Bolsonaro’s threats and open references to the legitimacy

of a military takeover stem not from his psychotic personality, as deranged as it is, but from the broader requirements of Brazilian capitalism, whose crisis has been massively deepened by the world impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. As with Donald Trump in the United States and other fascistic world leaders, Bolsonaro is not the cause, but the product of a broad turn towards authoritarianism in face of the deepest crisis of capitalism since the 1930s.

The particular focus of his speech on the role of “strikes” in the situation in Brazil in 1964, which was chiefly characterized by a broad working-class offensive which the military feared would get out of the control of the bourgeois-reformist Goulart, is significant. It is not merely a right-wing historical viewpoint, but rather a direct response to the eruption of working class opposition to the homicidal policies of the Brazilian and world bourgeoisie towards the COVID-19 pandemic and their use of the crisis to further advance their interests with corporate bailouts, austerity measures and the driving down of wages.

This reaction is already being seen across Brazil, where autoworkers have begun fighting against a jobs bloodbath, teachers and parents are opposing a homicidal back-to-school drive and Brazilian Post Office workers are entering the fourth week of a militant strike against the destruction of wages and working conditions.

Moreover, outrage over the absolute indifference of the ruling class to the more than 130,000 COVID-19 deaths and more than 4.3 million cases is joined by increasing popular anger over mass impoverishment and rising inflation, as the government cuts its so-called emergency relief to 67 million poor, informal and unemployed workers in half, to 300 reais (US\$50) monthly.

Just two days after Bolsonaro’s speech, it was reported that in several cities, markets were rationing sales of staples such as rice, milk and cooking oil. Prices of these commodities have gone up almost 20 percent since the beginning of the year due to the anarchic pursuit of profit by major capitalist producers, who were exporting their production amid a record fall in the value of the national currency, the real.

The cut to emergency relief is now being combined with a massive spike in official unemployment figures, previously hidden by workers dropping out of the workforce in order to take care of their families amid the uncontrolled spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This socially explosive situation is threatening the Brazilian ruling class with a major confrontation with the working class, and it is preparing accordingly. Bolsonaro’s threats closely mirror the terrified response to mass working class opposition in the United States on the part of the Trump administration, with which Bolsonaro has worked in

close coordination on many geopolitical issues.

His condemnation of “ideological radicalization,” generally mocked by pundits as inconsequential “Cold War lunacy,” is a close imitation of Trump’s own denunciations of Democratic mayors, and even the tried and tested corporate shill Joe Biden as “radical leftists.” These denunciations are directed not against right-wingers in the Brazilian Congress or the unions, but against working class opposition, which the government already denounced as “terrorist” when demonstrations erupted in June, amid the worldwide wave of opposition to police violence and inequality stemming from the murder of George Floyd.

Preparations for repression involve many other political actors beyond Bolsonaro and his inner circle. This was highlighted by the chilling censorship imposed by Rio de Janeiro courts against Brazil’s most powerful media group, the Globo conglomerate. Globo was prohibited from publishing material it had obtained from the investigation into the involvement of Bolsonaro’s son, Flávio, a Senator for Rio de Janeiro, in a money laundering scheme. The case ties the Bolsonaro family to the “Crime Office” gang, one of Rio’s infamous “militias” which terrorize working-class areas of the city and its outskirts. Globo claimed that the Rio de Janeiro Attorney General’s Office was preparing to formally charge Flávio and moving toward an indictment of Bolsonaro himself.

The corruption charges against Bolsonaro have been seen as a “cheap” means to remove him from office without involving a formal impeachment vote, which the Workers Party (PT)-led opposition has deemed “too costly” politically. At the same time, the censorship drive that has accompanied the worsening of the Brazilian social crisis indicates that significant sections of the ruling class may consider such charges also “too costly,” as they may not be able to remove Bolsonaro without further destabilizing the whole of Brazilian capitalism.

Under these conditions, the most urgent task facing Brazilian workers is breaking free from the political straitjacket imposed by the official opposition to Bolsonaro, led by the PT and its pseudo-left apologists in the PSOL (Socialism and Liberty Party). They are working to subordinate the growing movement of the working class to the stability of the capitalist state, ultimately collaborating with the ruling class in the strengthening of the repressive forces.



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